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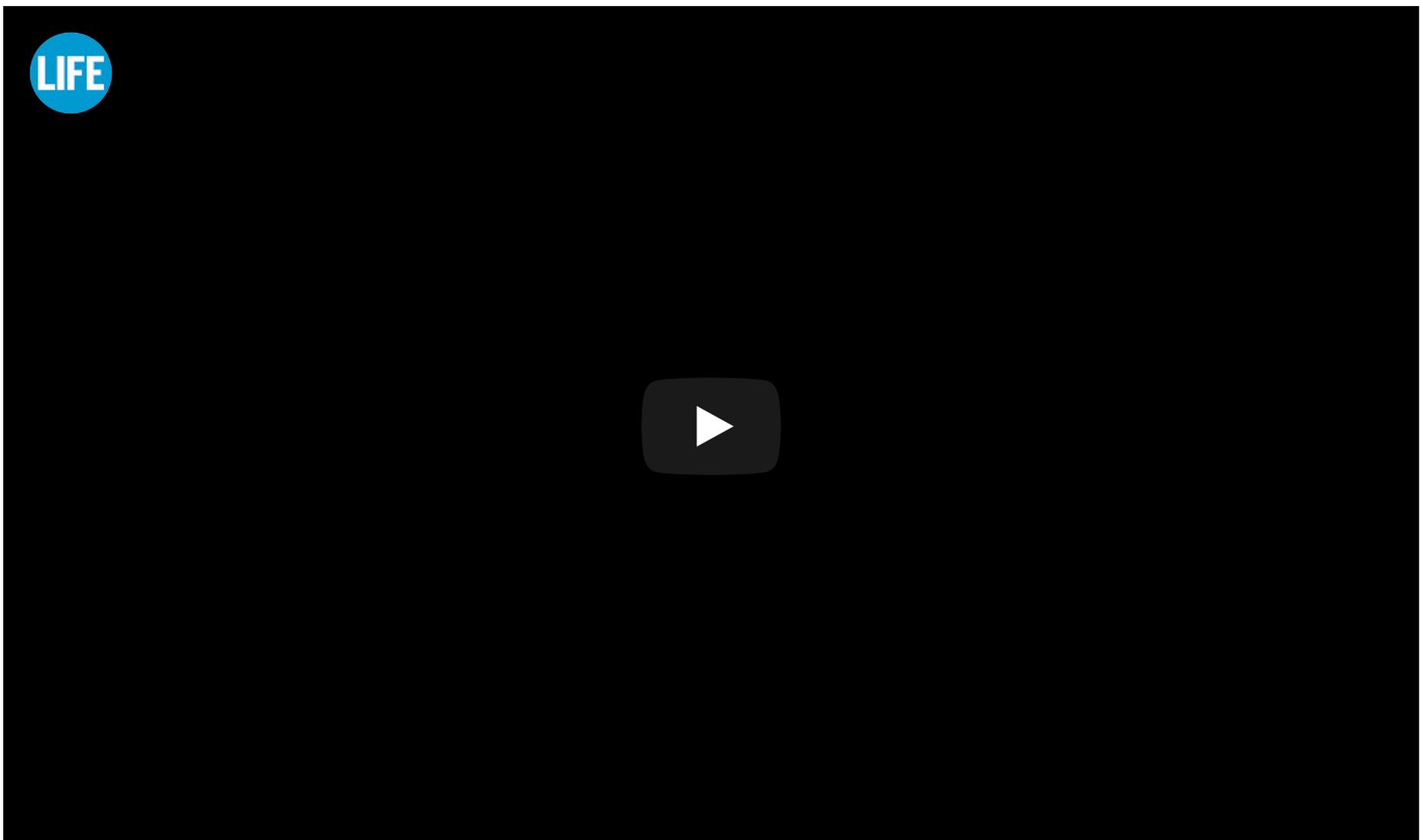
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# Pope Francis attacked and stonewalled sex abuse victims while archbishop of Buenos Aires

September 12, 2018 (LifeSiteNews) – The world is currently focused on Pope Francis’ involvement in the affair of clerical sex abuser Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. However, the recent claims made by former apostolic nuncio Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò against Pope Francis in the matter are only the beginning of a long record of sex abuse cover-ups by Pope Francis and Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio that stretches back decades.

Although Francis famously claimed in his 2010 book *On Heaven and Earth* that sex abuse by clergy “has never occurred in my diocese” and “in the diocese it never happened to me,” the evidence to date indicates that Pope Francis is involved in multiple cover-ups of clerical sexual predators in South America, including his own archdiocese. His involvement in at least two of these cases has continued during his papacy.

In a 2017 documentary by the French news program Cash Investigation, six different individuals claiming to be sex abuse victims in the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires told reporters that they had been sexually abused by clergy there, and that they had written to Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio to inform him, but that he had never answered their complaints (see video below).



To this day Pope Francis has only expressed regret for one of these cover-ups, the Barros affair, following a massive public outcry in Chile over his strong-arm tactics against victims. The other cases continue to be hushed-up, ignored, and stonewalled.

The pope recently told sex abuse survivors in Ireland that those who cover up sexual abuse are “caca” (feces) and recently said that such priests should be removed and their accusers should be accompanied in the civil courts. However, Francis has done exactly the opposite, and continues to refuse to meet with victims he not only refused to accompany, but whom he sought for years to discredit with judges.

LifeSite is including links to its sources in the Spanish-speaking and French media regarding these cases so that the public can verify their veracity and to facilitate the reporting by other journalists on this topic.

## **The case of Julio César Grassi, convicted child sex abuser defended by Bergoglio**

Perhaps the most egregious case of obstruction, stonewalling, and negligence regarding a clerical child sex abuser on the part of Jorge Bergoglio was that of Julio César Grassi, a priest famous throughout Argentina for his work with poor and orphan children, and who became the subject of numerous accusations by teen residents of his facilities, which led to his conviction for sex abuse of a minor in 2013 as well as other charges and a sentence of more than 15 years in prison.

While refusing to speak to Grassi’s victims, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio engineered a campaign to discredit the victims and to influence the judges in the case, which may have resulted in some of the charges being dismissed. Despite these efforts, Grassi was convicted in the case of one victim who was able to identify hidden marks and other characteristics of Grassi’s body, and his conviction has been upheld by multiple appeals courts, including a final ruling by the Supreme Court of Argentina in March of 2016. Nonetheless, Pope Francis continues to allow Grassi to function as a priest. Despite ongoing requests, Francis has not yet met with victims nor apologized to them.

Fr. Julio Cesar Grassi is a priest of the Diocese of Morón, which was under Bergoglio’s metropolitan authority as Archbishop of Buenos Aires. There Grassi personally oversaw a residential facility housing approximately 400 children. The priest’s efforts to raise money for his “Happy Children Foundation” (Fundación Felices los Niños), which managed seventeen facilities throughout the country for over six thousand children, made him a national celebrity and generated the equivalent of millions of dollars in donations annually.

Grassi’s image as a crusader for a humanitarian cause made him a subject of national pride and gave him immense public credibility, as he forged close relationships with some of the wealthiest and most powerful figures in Argentinean society. By the late 1990s he had become a priest celebrity who seemed untouchable.

However, Grassi’s charitable empire began to collapse in 2002 when a series of investigative reports in the Argentinean media revealed a total of five accusations against him of sexual abuse from former residents of his care facilities, some of which had been on file with the police for two

years. The alleged victims said that Grassi had made attempts to sexually seduce them and had performed perverse sexual acts on them. The television program *Telenoche Investiga*, which first reported the case, reported that Grassi also had been accused of sexual predation against seminarians as vice rector of a seminary in 1997. The country was riveted by the claims and Argentinians were divided over the likelihood of their veracity.

As a result of the media investigations, Grassi was soon prosecuted for over a dozen charges of sexual abuse of three of the purported victims. What followed was a 15-year saga in the courts of Argentina, in which Grassi and his team of over twenty high-power attorneys repeatedly attempted to intimidate and discredit Grassi's accusers.

"Gabriel," the victim whose testimony resulted in Grassi's conviction, says that the harassment against him and attempts to steal evidence from him became so strong that he had to be enrolled in a witness protection program. His story is corroborated by his psychiatrist and advocate, Enrique Stola, who has stated repeatedly to the press that he himself was threatened and that his house had been entered multiple times by people who had beaten him over his involvement in the case.

One of Grassi's attorneys, Miguel Angel Pierri, was jailed twice after having falsely portrayed himself as a lawyer for one of the purported victims for the purpose of taking the victim to a court and pressuring him to retract his testimony. The "retraction" was later thrown out by the court when the deception was discovered.

To this show of force by the powerful Grassi was added the clout of the four-member Executive Committee of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, including Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio as the conference's Second Vice President, which sought to portray Grassi's prosecution as an anti-Catholic conspiracy, a line similar to the one taken by Grassi's legal team.

In a thinly-veiled reference to the Grassi case, the episcopal conference's executive committee claimed it was "astounded by the persistence of attacks which, in our day, seek to smear the image of the Church." While admitting that priests are capable of sinning and expressing a desire to reach the truth, the committee added, "It may be that the hidden side of this campaign is the desire for the Church to lose its trust that society places in it, or for it to cease to expound upon the moral and social consequences of its principles."

It was this conspiracy-theory approach to the case that Cardinal Bergoglio would maintain after being elected President of the Argentinean Episcopal Conference in 2005, despite the mounting evidence and repeated convictions of Grassi as the years wore on.

## **Bergoglio's stealth campaign against Grassi's victims**

Bergoglio was not satisfied, however, with vague accusations of ulterior motives behind the prosecution. While it appears that neither Bergoglio nor the Bishop of Morón undertook a canonical investigation of Grassi, and Bergoglio ignored requests by the victims to discuss their accusations with him, the Cardinal Archbishop of Buenos Aires began a stealth campaign to discredit the victims with the judges in the case and secure a verdict of innocence.

Bergoglio's effort to prevent the conviction of Grassi went so far as to include the commission of a series of four books devoted to casting doubt on the purported victims' testimonies and attacking the victims themselves. The books were produced for Bergoglio and the Argentinean Episcopal Conference by the eminent jurist Marcelo Sancinetti. The series was entitled, "Studies on the 'Grassi case,'" and filled more than 2,600 pages.

The books seek to discredit Grassi's purported victims, openly calling them "false accusers" and even implying that they are projecting their own homosexual desires onto Grassi. Echoing Grassi's arguments and those of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, they theorize that the prosecution of Grassi has arisen out of a conspiracy against his "Happy Children Foundation" by several media outlets who were seeking to destroy the organization. In an epilogue Sancinetti goes so far as to compare Grassi to the prophet Daniel placed in a den of lions.

The books were published in secret and never revealed to the public, and they contained no editorial imprint. However, the final of the four volumes, published in 2013, had the following text on the first page dated July, 2013: "With this [volume], these 'Studies on the Grassi case' are concluded, and the labor assigned by the Argentinean Episcopal Conference, in particular by Cardinal Bergoglio, then its president and today His Holiness Francis."



Defenders of the project have claimed that the books were meant only for the bishops of the Argentinean Episcopal Conference, but the evidence indicates that they were meant to influence the judges in the case. The Argentinean news service Infobae reported in 2016 that its sources within the nation's Supreme Court had confirmed that the books were given to the members of the court. The lawyer of two of Grassi's accusers, "Luis" and "Ezequiel," Juan Pablo Gallego, also confirmed the claim in an interview with Infobae.

"The books arrived to the judges of the [Supreme] Court, presumably delivered by supposed emissaries of Francis," Gallego told Infobae. "What is certain is that we determined that they were received by every judge that had to decide on the Grassi case. They weren't only delivered to the Supreme Court, where they are held, for example, by Ricardo Lorenzetti; they were also delivered to the judges of the provincial appeals court."

“I am certain that the judges of the Supreme Court have these books and that they came to them in the name of the Church,” concluded Gallego. Infobae says that representatives of the Supreme Court denied the claim when asked for comment.

The claim that judges were given copies of the book has been confirmed publicly by at least one judge, Carlos Mahiques, who told the French television news magazine Cash Investigation in 2017 that he personally received the books (see program transcript in English here).

“You received this counter-inquiry?” asked the Cash Investigation reporter. “Yes, I did,” responded Mahiques.

“Did it influence your judgment?” the reporter asked. “Absolutely not,” responded Mahiques. “The study is a bit like a detective novel. I think it’s partial in some areas, and extremely partial in others. It’s clearly in favor of Father Grassi. They were trying to exert a subtle form of pressure on the judges.”

Today, Sancinetti refuses to discuss his authorship of the books with the Argentinean press. He repeatedly failed to respond to interview requests from Infobae in 2016, but a colleague told the media outlet, “Doctor [Sancinetti] doesn’t want to give any interview over the topic of Grassi.”

Asked for his opinion about the series of books, Grassi’s “main victim” (presumably “Gabriel,” whose testimony led to Grassi’s conviction) told Cash Investigation (see transcript), “I’ll never forget what Father Grassi kept repeating at his trial: ‘Bergoglio never let go of my hand.’ Now, Bergoglio is Pope Francis, but he has never gone against Grassi’s words. So I’m certain that he never did let go of Grassi’s hand!”

Infobae reports that Grassi used the same phrase when speaking to that news agency in 2009.

“[Bergoglio] never let go of my hand. He is at my side as always,” Grassi reportedly said.

## **Grassi's victims stonewalled by Bergoglio for over a decade**

Juan Pablo Gallego also told Infobae that he attempted repeatedly to talk to Bergoglio in 2003, when witnesses were repeatedly threatened and intimidated by attorneys and partisans of Grassi, to ask him to dissuade Grassi and his team from such tactics. However, he never received a response. Ultimately Gallego was received by the then bishop of Morón, Justo Laguna, and Argentinean President Nestor Kirchner, “who received the request favorably.”

The psychiatrist Enrique Stola, who treated two of those accusing Grassi of sexual abuse, told a government news agency that the purported victims “Luis” and “Ezequiel” had tried to contact Bergoglio as well, and confirmed that neither of them received a response. His statement is confirmed by the head of Argentina’s Committee for Monitoring the Rights of the Child, Nora Schulman, who told the Argentinean publication Clarin that Francis “never received the victims of Fr. Julio César Grassi.” She added that, following the Supreme Court’s ratification of the sentence against Grassi, she expected the victims to approach the Vatican to request Pope Francis’ intervention and to ask that Grassi be removed from the priesthood.

Miriam Lewin, the journalist who originally broke the story on Grassi in 2002, recently told *El Pais* that she had approached the pope personally to ask him to meet with Grassi’s victims.

“In November of 2015, I went to the Vatican and I spoke for some minutes with the Pope to ask him to make a gesture to victims,” Lewin said. “He listened to me and I thought that he would do it, but he never called them. His rhetoric against pedophilia is very tough, but it should be reflected in concrete acts in this case. The victims need reparation, an apology. It is not understood how Grassi can continue to be a priest.”

## **Francis’ Vatican continues to protect Grassi in prison, and continues to ignore victims**

After a nine-month trial that included over 130 witnesses, Grassi was convicted in 2009 of molesting one of the three children, given the name “Gabriel” in the media. Three different appeals courts upheld Grassi’s conviction, including Argentina’s Supreme Court. He began to serve his fifteen-year sentence in 2013. He has also been convicted for misuse of public funds in the operation of his foundation, adding two more years to his prison time.

Investigative journalists revealed in 2015 that Grassi has the enjoyment of his own room in the prison with his own office, private bathroom, cable TV, a 21-inch color television, a computer with internet access, a heater, and a minibar. He is accused of paying for these amenities by diverting whole truckloads of food donations from his “Happy Children Foundation” to prison officials. He is now being prosecuted a third time for such abuses.

Despite his repeatedly upheld convictions in Argentina's secular courts, it appears that Grassi has never been tried in any ecclesiastical court. Moreover, he has never been stripped of his priesthood, although he is prohibited from the public celebration of the sacraments. He continues to wear his collar in prison. As late as August of 2017 he was listed among diocesan clergy, which means that the Diocese of Morón was continuing to extend priestly faculties to him, allowing him to hear confessions and perform other sacraments that would be otherwise invalidated. The current list of diocesan clergy does not include his name.

Regarding Grassi's continuing status as a Catholic priest, the Diocese of Morón has stated publicly that the case is in the hands of the Vatican, that is, in the hands of Jorge Bergoglio, now Pope Francis.

In March of 2017, following the Supreme Court's unanimous ratification of the conviction of Grassi, the Diocese of Morón issued a press release revealing that "The Holy See has opportunely ordered a preliminary investigation regarding the accusations about the conduct of this priest," and that this had resulted in "a report that was sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," and added that the diocese "will act in accordance with the prevailing canonical processes determined by the Holy See." However, the Holy See has yet to act, leaving Grassi with his priestly faculties intact.

According to the Spanish newspaper *El Pais*, a source close to Pope Francis admits that Francis has given confessions to Grassi but claims Grassi is exaggerating their relationship. The source also claimed that responsibility in the case lies not with Pope Francis but with the Diocese of Morón, contradicting the diocese's claim that the pope has responsibility. Nonetheless, the same source tried to defend Grassi as the victim of an elaborate conspiracy and raised doubts about Grassi's guilt.

"[Bergoglio] didn't support Grassi," a source close to Bergoglio told *El Pais*. "He didn't go to visit him in jail, but he didn't speak [about it] because he wasn't his bishop, and because there was much doubt about his guilt."

"Behind this scandal [of the Grassi prosecution] there was an economic operation by the rivals of Grassi in important businesses. It wasn't clear if it was an intelligence operation," *El Pais* was told.

According to the Vatican's press secretariat, also speaking to *El Pais*, Pope Francis isn't intervening because the case was handled by a secular court. The secretariat also claimed that Francis is in favor of "absolute support" for sex abuse victims.

"The response of the Pope is always clear: maximum respect for civil justice, zero tolerance of the guilty and absolute support for the victims," Francis' press agency stated. "The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is just now in these days giving the required indications and finishing an

examination of the situation for the purpose of adopting a definitive resolution.”

The statement was made to *El País* no later than April of 2017, when the article was published. No decision by Pope Francis or the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has been announced since that time.

In March of the same year, after months of futile attempts to question Pope Francis about the Grassi case, the French journalist Élise Lucet of the television news magazine *Cash Investigation* confronted Pope Francis in person over his involvement in the Grassi case (see video here; see full documentary in English here).

When asked by Lucet if he had attempted to influence the judiciary in the Grassi case, Francis turned to her with a scowl on his face and waved his arms. “Not at all!” he said. After beginning to walk away, he turned back and repeated the statement insistently, “Not at all!” His scowl then became a smile, he waved, and walked away.

The Holy See Press Office did not respond to our request for comment by press time. However, LifeSite did receive an accidental response to our email that was meant for some other recipient, and we therefore can confirm that they received our request.

*Contact the author here.*

